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DPHSS Guidance Memorandum 2021-09

RE: Additional Guidance Relative to Adopting 3 Feet Social Distancing for In-Class Operations for K-12 Schools

The purpose of this Guidance is to provide further clarification for schools adopting the three (3) feet social distancing for in-class operations for K-12 Schools (Schools). Schools should continue to abide by all the provisions in DPHSS Guidance Memorandum 2021-02 (See https://dphss.guam.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DPHSS-Guidance-Memo-2021-02-MIN-REQ-4-SCHOOLS-In-Class-and-IHEs_01.15.21.pdf); except as provided herein with regard to mask wearing and physical distancing. Nothing herein is intended to require that schools reduce their current physical distancing measures to three (3) feet.

The following Guidance shall be adhered to:

A. Universal and Correct Use of Masks

1. Core principle for masks:

- a. Require consistent and correct use of well-fitting face masks that must cover both the nose and mouth at the same time with proper filtration by all students, visitors, teachers, and staff to prevent COVID-19 transmission through respiratory droplets.
 - b. Masks should be worn at all times, by all people in school facilities, with certain exceptions for certain people, or for certain settings or activities, such as while eating or drinking.
 - c. Masks should be required in all classroom and non-classroom settings, including hallways, school offices, restrooms, gyms, auditoriums, etc.
2. Mask policies for all students, visitors, teachers, and staff set the expectation that people will use masks throughout the School.
 3. Face shields may be used in addition to a face mask. Face shield should never be worn in lieu of a face mask.
 - a. If you do choose to wear a face shield, ensure they fit properly and can be cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's directions.
 4. School staff are to provide a face mask to any student who does not have one or who arrives to the School without one.
 5. The most effective fabrics for cloth masks are tightly woven, such as cotton and cotton blends, breathable, and in two or three fabric layers.
 6. Masks with exhalation valves or vents, those that use loosely woven fabrics, and those that do not fit properly are prohibited.

7. Schools will adopt U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for face coverings for certain population and situations, including those with certain medical conditions, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or asthma (e.g., “Who Should Not Wear a Cloth Face Covering” and “Feasibility and Adaptations”).
 - a. Most students, including those with disabilities, can tolerate and safely wear a mask. However, a narrow subset of students with disabilities might not be able to wear a mask or cannot safely wear a mask.
 - b. Those who cannot safely wear a mask—for example, a person with a disability who, for reasons related to the disability, would be physically unable to remove a mask without assistance if breathing becomes obstructed—should not be required to wear one.
 - c. For the remaining portion of the subset, Schools should make individualized determinations as required by Federal disability laws in order to determine if an exception to the mask requirement is necessary and appropriate for a particular student.
 - d. If a child with a disability cannot wear a mask, maintain physical distance, or adhere to other public health requirements, the student is still entitled to an appropriate education, which in some circumstances may need to be provided virtually.
8. Mask use are required on school buses and other public transportation; school systems should take appropriate steps to ensure compliance with this requirement by students, staff, and others.
9. If visitors are permitted in School, they are required to wear masks at all times and should maintain minimum distance of 6 feet social distancing from others.
10. Schools should encourage modeling of correct and consistent mask use by school leaders, local leaders, and others respected in the community.

B. Physical Distancing

1. Core principle for physical distancing:
 - a. Establish school policies and implement structural interventions to promote physical distance between people.
2. Between students in classrooms
 - a. Students should be at least three (3) feet apart.¹
3. Maintain 6 feet of distance in the following settings:
 - a. Between adults (teachers and staff), and between adults and students, at all times in the school building. Several studies have found that transmission between staff is more common than transmission between students and staff, and among students, in schools.
 - b. When masks cannot be worn, such as when eating.
 - c. During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band, or sports and exercise. Move these activities outdoors or to large, well-ventilated space, when possible.
 - d. In common areas such as school lobbies and auditoriums.

¹ The CDC recommends middle and high school schools should only utilize three (3) feet social distancing in areas low, moderate, or substantial community transmission. In areas of high community transmission, middle and high school students should be 6 feet apart if cohorting is not possible. Under Guam’s current Covid Area Risk Score, the island is considered a low or moderate community transmission area. Should Guam’s CAR Score increase significantly, DPHSS may require all schools to revert to six (6) feet social distancing.

- c. During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band, or sports and exercise. Move these activities outdoors or to large, well-ventilated space, when possible.
 - d. In common areas such as school lobbies and auditoriums.
4. Use cohorting², and maintain six (6) feet of distance between cohorts where possible. Limit contact between cohorts. In areas of substantial and high levels of community transmission, schools that use less than six (6) feet between students in classrooms, cohorting is recommended, with at least six (6) feet maintained between cohorts.
5. Remove nonessential furniture and make other changes to classroom layouts to maximize distance between students.
6. Face desks in the same direction, where possible.
7. Eliminate or decrease nonessential in-person interactions among teachers and staff during meetings, lunches, and other situations that could lead to adult-to-adult transmission.
8. Visitors:
 - a. Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations as much as possible.
 - b. Require all visitors to wear masks and physically distance from others.
9. Transportation:
 - a. Create distance between children on school buses (for example, seat children one child per row, skip rows), when possible.
 - b. Masks are required by federal order on school buses and other forms of public transportation in the United States.
 - c. Open windows to improve ventilation when it does not create a safety hazard.
 - d. More information about school transportation and prevention is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>.
10. Additional suggestions for physical distancing:
 - a. Staggered scheduling: Stagger school arrival and drop-off times or locations by cohort, or put in place other protocols to limit contact between cohorts, as well as direct contact with parents.
 - b. Alternate schedules with fixed cohorts of students and staff to decrease class size and promote physical distancing.

Attached is a listing of useful resources:

- Attachment A: Guam K-12 Public and Private School, and IHE Re-opening Plan Template
 - <https://dphss.guam.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Attachment-A--K-12-School-and-IHE-Re-opening-Plan-Template.pdf>
- Attachment B: High Touch Surface Sanitization/Disinfection Guidance
 - <https://dphss.guam.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Attachment-B--High-Touch-Surface-Sanitization-Disinfection-General-Guidance.pdf>
- Attachment C: List of Other Resources

² Cohorting (or podding) is one of many mitigation strategies that schools can use to limit mixing between students and staff and to limit the spread of COVID-19.

- a. A cohort or pod is a distinct group that stays together throughout the entire school day during in-person learning, or over the course of any pre-determined period of time, so that there is minimal or no interaction between groups.
- b. This practice can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by limiting cross-over of students and teachers to the extent possible.

- o <https://dphss.guam.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Attachment-C--List-of-other-COVID-19-Resources.pdf>

All In-Class Operating Plans for Schools must be emailed to PCOR3Plans@dphss.guam.gov. If plans have previously been submitted, such plans must be resubmitted in accordance with the minimum requirements set forth in this DPHSS Guidance Memorandum for Schools opting to adopt three (3) feet social distancing for in-class operations for K-12 schools.

DPHSS' initial approval of all submitted plans will be conditional until receipt of plans and compliance inspection by Division of Environmental Health (DEH). For additional questions, please contact the DEH at 300-9579; 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.


ARTHUR U. SAN AGUSTIN, MHR
Director

Attachments